Lesson 16

Returning to the Essence of Life

【Preliminary Reflection】

Life is immeasurably precious. In the face of our swiftly changing age, people hurry to keep pace, yet often lose their way in life—unaware of it, or simply too busy to notice. What, then, is the true meaning of life? And what wisdom does Buddhism offer to help me understand life and attain a happy life?

【Study Requirements】

- Read *Returning to the Essence of Life* at least three times.
- Listen to the audio *Returning to the Essence of Life.*
- Based on the content of the lesson, complete the mind map.
- Reflect on how to integrate the method into your daily study and practice.

【Reflection Questions】

Answer below questions with reference to the text.

1. The opening section of the text

(a) What are the three fundamental components of life?
(b) Which aspect do people generally care about the most?
(c) How does Buddhism regard daily living, life-and-death, and life as a whole?
(d) Why is studying Buddhism considered a genuine life project?

2. Returning to Right View

(a) What is the importance of right views in building a happy life?
(b) Why is it said that most people's views are often mistaken?
(c) What problems exist in our current feelings, perceptions, and views, and how have they affected our lives?
(d) How can we return to the right understanding?

3.Returning to Nature

(a) We were meant to be one with nature. Why has our life today become disconnected from nature?
(b) What price have we paid for this disconnection?
(c) Compared with a life driven by greed, what is the meaning and value of returning to a simple and natural way of life?

4. Returning to the True Self

(a) What is self-attachment?
(b) What are its specific manifestations?
(c) What harm does it bring to our lives when we label what is not truly "mine" as "mine"?

(d) How can we step beyond the delusion of self and return to the true nature of life?

5. **Integrating Study and Practice**

(a) What is the significance of studying and practicing the Dharma for correctly understanding life?
(b) How does it support returning to a natural way of living?
(c) How does it help build a life of wisdom?
(d) How does it ultimately lead to returning to the essence of life?

【Contemplation Questions】

Reflect on the teachings and relate them to my own life, discuss the below scenarios.

1. "The times are racing forward, and modern technology has brought countless conveniences and comforts. Is it still necessary to return to a simple and natural way of life? And even if we wished to return, how could it be easy?"

How do I understand this question? Based on this lesson, what wisdom have I learned about returning to a simple and natural way of living, and how can this wisdom help me live a happier life?

2. "I can understand that the body, identity, wealth, status, emotions, and views do not truly represent 'me'—yet I still feel that all of these together *are* 'me.'"

What are the consequences of this way of thinking? Before fully realizing no-self, how can I use the wisdom of no-self to respond to the afflictions I encounter in daily life?

3. Through this lesson, what other mistaken views from my past have I come to recognize? What doubts do I still have about returning to right view, returning to nature, and returning to the true self—questions that I would like to explore together with everyone?

【Learning Application】

1. By examining the problems in my self-understanding, everyday views, and lifestyle, what positive experiences have I noticed through rethinking and making choices with the wisdom presented in this lesson?

2. By applying the wisdom of dependent origination and no-self in daily life—observing and adjusting myself, and helping those around me gradually establish right views and return to a healthy, natural, and simple way of living—how have I been able to reduce afflictions and live with greater clarity, ease, openness, and compassion?

【Sharing Appreciation】

During the sharing, listen attentively. Before the session ends, take a moment to express in one or two sentences what insights or inspiration you gained from your classmates, cultivating a grateful and joyful mind.

【Meditation Guidance】

1. Meditation on Views

a) Contemplative Meditation

Contemplation: Human life comprises three components—daily living, life-and-death, and life as a whole. Most people attend only to the level of daily living, whereas the essence of life is life itself. Right view is the safeguard of a happy life, yet ordinary views arise from cognition, cognition rests upon feeling, and feeling is often dull and mistaken. Only the Buddhist wisdom of impermanence, no-self, dependent origination, and karma can help me discern the truth of myself and the world, return to a simple and natural way of living, remove the many labels of "me," and realize the truth of no-self. I will learn the wisdom of dependent origination and karma, adjust my views to return to a simple and natural way of living, awaken the innate awareness already within me, and return to the essence of life.

b) Abiding Meditation

Repeatedly reflect on the above views, and abide in the intention:
"I will learn the wisdom of dependent origination and karma, adjust my views to return to a simple and natural way of living, awaken the innate awareness already within me, and return to the essence of life," for as long as possible.

2. Meditation on Mindsets

a) Contemplative Meditation

Contemplation: When my life grows busy and burdensome with afflictions, I will re-examine my lived reality through the wisdom of dependent origination and karmic causality, adjust my views and way of living. Through the study of Buddhist wisdom, I

cultivate confidence, aspiration, and joy by returning to right view, to nature, and to the true self.

b) Abiding Meditation

Repeatedly reflect on the above views, and abide in the intention as long as possible: "Develop confidence, aspiration, and joy in accomplishing the return to right view, to nature, and to the true self through the study of Buddhist wisdom."

【Self-Reflection】

1. I have become alert to the limitations and confusions of my self-understanding, and I resolve to study the wisdom of dependent origination and no-self in order to return to right view.
2. I have redefined the standards of a happy life, cultivating gratitude, cherishing, and love for nature. I will establish a healthier and more natural way of living, with few desires and contentment, and give rise to an aspiration to return to the essence of life.